United Nations A/62/PV.114

General Assembly
Sixty-second session

Official Records

114th plenary meeting
Monday, 21 July 2008, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Kerim ..... (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Hannesson (Iceland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Meeting on the global food and energy crisis

Agenda item 48 (*continued*)

Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

Mr. Biabaroh-Iboro (Congo) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes the convening of this important debate on the global food and energy crisis. The crisis gives rise to extremely worrying events in many countries and could deal a death blow to already fragile economies and to social cohesion in poor countries.

My delegation endorses the statements made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by the representative of Ethiopia on behalf of the African Group, but would like to make some comments in its national capacity.

The current food crisis is particularly complex: it is substantially different from previous crises. It is generated by a combination of factors, among them climate change, the biofuel issue, protectionism, agricultural subsidies, demographic pressure and the surge in oil prices. For its part, the current energy crisis, while posing a problem in itself, is also a decisive factor in the food crisis. It is therefore imperative to adopt a holistic approach including all of these interdependent issues. There is no better place to consider coherent consensus-based solutions than this universal Organization.

We therefore thank the Secretary-General and the High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis for having presented Member States with an important working document that conveys the consensus among international organizations and institutions on the best ways to combat the food crisis. In our view, that comprehensive framework for action takes account of all the multidimensional aspects of this serious problem, even if more time is required to study it. It aims to provide the international community with the means to face the triple challenge of combating climate change, attaining the Millennium Development Goals and combating the global food and energy crisis, while at the same time addressing the need for flexible implementation in consonance with each country's particular conditions and needs. My delegation therefore expresses its support for consideration of the opportunities offered by the comprehensive framework for action, with a view to reaching the goal of integrated rural development.

We welcome the emergency worldwide of other complementary initiatives aimed principally at eradicating world poverty and hunger. These include: the African business plan under the New Partnership for Africa's Development, which gives priority to addressing the challenges facing Africa, including agricultural development; the new partnership among

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

08-43091 (E)

the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) established on 4 June at the recent FAO Conference on World Food Security, held in Rome; the final declaration adopted by consensus at that conference on 5 June, which urges the international community, in particular the countries of the Group of Eight, to help poor countries to withstand the shock of soaring food prices; the FAO initiative on soaring food prices, which we would like to see extended to all countries threatened by the food crisis; and the FAO appeal for $30 billion a year to combat the food crisis.

While considering that food aid is not enough to resolve the complex problem of world hunger, Congo favours increased budgets for organizations such as the WFP, in order to help them deal with increased food prices. We also favour the implementation of crisis mitigation measures by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, including increasing agricultural loans for Africa and providing emergency monetary assistance to the most severely affected countries, among other measures.

We welcome the readiness of some countries to increase their emergency food aid. These include the United States of America, which on 14 April made available $200 million from a special trust fund in order to bolster the capacity of the United States Agency for International Development. Another instance is that of Saudi Arabia, whose $500 million in assistance has enabled the WFP to reach its goal of $755 million, in the context of its emergency food crisis appeal. Likewise, we take note of the commitment to double its assistance to Africa between now and 2012 undertaken by Japan at the fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development of 28 to 30 May 2008 at Yokohama, not to mention the efforts of France and the European Union.

In Africa, we welcome the establishment at its annual meeting, held from 14 and 15 May 2008 in Maputo, of a financing mechanism within the African Development Bank intended to facilitate access to fertilizers for States members of the African Union.

As regards biofuels, the debate should be framed not so much in terms of systematic opposition between subsistence crops and that specific source of energy, as in terms of a quest for a fair balance between food security and energy security.

Congo has pledged to put in place a national strategy to preserve natural ecosystems based on socio-economic realities.

The Congolese Government reserves the right to ensure that the impact of national policies and of all agreements arising from the current rounds of negotiation be, insofar as possible, the subject of follow-up so that they are not implemented to the detriment of the poorest populations and of long-term national interests.

In conclusion, Congo is firmly convinced that the current food crisis is not something that we must resign ourselves to, but affords an opportunity to restore agriculture to its priority position, especially in developing countries.

As it strives to join States in implementing that priority objective, the United Nations should, inter alia, secure the desired strengthening of systemwide coordination in order truly to be in a position to demand respect for commitments undertaken and to achieve efficiency in the implementation of the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and in the harmonious execution of the comprehensive framework for action.

Mr. Lima (Cape Verde) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the President for having convened this very important meeting. Allow me also to congratulate the Secretary-General for the report presented by the High-Level Task Force and for his tireless efforts to end the crisis.

Cape Verde associates itself with the statements made by the representatives of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and of Ethiopia on behalf of the Group of African States.

There can clearly be no doubt as to the correlation between the global food crisis and the energy crisis. The causes of those crises are many, some natural and others man-made, but what seems indisputably evident today is that the consequences of the crises fall on the poorest and the most vulnerable, who see two thirds of their income spent on food and nothing or almost nothing devoted to medical care, education or other household expenses. Recent estimates indicate that more than 800 million people currently run the risk of experiencing hunger, and in

recent months, 100 million additional people will enter the ranks of those who meet the criteria of extreme poverty.

Due to the effects of climate change, drought and desertification, floods, deforestation and the growing use of arable land for biofuels, the growing scarcity of water resources, not to mention market speculation, the high costs of oil and fertilizers, as well as erroneous policies promoted planetwide, the global food supply can no longer keep pace with the growing world population, which will reach 9 billion people in 2050.

It is important to understand that the coincidence of the global food and energy crisis with climate change is a global challenge and a potential threat to peace and security. We have learned from the riots that have erupted in various countries that people already living in conditions of extreme vulnerability are in a stranglehold and capable of desperate and uncontrolled action that could exacerbate the current crisis and take on dimensions that we cannot foresee. Global solutions are thus required in order to properly meet the concerns of all nations and their peoples.

Along those lines, permanent solutions based on defensive actions do not seem to correspond to the real solutions that are required. The food problem is now a humanitarian problem and touches on the general interests of all, and therefore requires decisive action now more than ever before, particularly in the financial sphere on the basis of a partnership of solidarity.

We greatly appreciate the comprehensive framework for action presented by the High-Level Task Force, which should be adopted as a common and coordinated strategy document. We greatly appreciate the interpretations of the framework that we have heard during the course of this debate and hope that the criticism and observations will be taken into account to the benefit of common action.

It is crucial to strengthen political will with a view to ensuring that the actions recommended in the comprehensive framework for action are implemented by all at all levels — national, regional and international — as swiftly as possible, taking into account the specificities of each country. I run the risk of repeating myself, but we believe that predictable and reliable financial support is crucial if such actions are to succeed in ending the crisis.

The global food crisis could be a great opportunity, as other speakers have said before me, to make thorough changes in the current world order that can guarantee direct investment in the agricultural sector of developing countries, particularly in Africa, responding thereby to one of the causes of poverty in the world. Likewise, local farmers should be able to obtain support for their own self-sufficiency and to allow them to discard outdated models of unsustainable food development.

The probability of achieving the Millennium Development Goals is diminishing daily for many developing countries. The global food and energy crisis highlights the need to adopt a holistic approach to sustainable development. In our interdependent world, there can be no progress in reducing the impact of climate change without real progress with respect to sustainable development. A substantial increase in the quantity and quality of official development assistance to meet the 0.7 per cent of gross national income; additional assistance for adaptation to climate change, including financial assistance for developing and vulnerable countries; technology transfer, including clean technologies; and investment in infrastructure are all undoubtedly urgent.

However, equitable trade; the successful completion of the Doha Round; eliminating the unsustainable debt of developing countries, small island developing States and middle-income countries; and reform of the global financial architecture are all complementary and essential elements that should be borne in mind within that framework. What is certain is that decisive action is necessary in the short, medium and long term in order to preserve human security.

My country, Cape Verde, greatly depends on the importation of oil and consumer goods, including a large number of food commodities. Domestic production represents only 20 per cent of the country's needs due to our geographic configuration and the effects of an increasingly unpredictable climate. Our archipelago is also vulnerable to external shocks, and therefore the repercussions of the increase in food and oil prices endanger our already fragile economy and could affect our political stability.

In order to minimize the impact on our population of the growing prices in the international market for agricultural commodities and oil, the Government of Cape Verde has taken compensatory measures despite

their impact on the budget. The country's development is currently in jeopardy and, due to the effects of climate change, the lives of our people are certainly at increasing risk. Our vulnerability now overshadows our indices of progress, and the fact that we are now part of the group of middle-income countries is but meagre consolation. That is why we support the joint proposal made by Egypt, Chile and Indonesia to request that the central theme of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly focus on food security and development.

There is no doubt that people do not want to continue to live in a world where the great majority must increasingly suffer every ill and pay such a high price just to be part of humankind. We firmly believe that it is only a matter of time until all peoples realize that humankind can live together and achieve a decent life of progress in peace and harmony with Mother Nature.

Mr. Urbina (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by thanking the President of the General Assembly for the timely convening of this debate. I also thank the Secretary-General for his presence and for his message last Friday.

My delegation associates itself with the statements made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Honduras on behalf of the Central American Integration System and by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The food and energy crises are compounded today by other adverse global phenomena that pose an unprecedented challenge to humankind. That challenge compels us to devise and undertake innovative steps that should also bear the stamp of solidarity. The food crisis, which has brought us together today, is very different in nature from others that have preceded it, foremost because any prior phenomenon was acknowledged to be a geographically limited shortage of food, but this is the first time that specialists are referring to a global food crisis.

The crisis is also unique in that no previous food shortage has been so acute, nor have its manifestations been so global. Currently, food reserves are at their lowest point in many decades, while the rise in food prices has been felt in even the smallest and most remote village on the planet. Another new feature of the food crisis is that, for the first time, abundant harvests worldwide have accompanied the dearth of food. Notwithstanding such abundance, the heartening recovery from poverty of hundreds of millions of human beings in recent years has generated an additional demand that is contributing to today's shortage.

Therefore, the limited instruments to address this unprecedented challenge also need to be novel. We can rely no longer, or only to a small extent, on an expansion of farmland. Arable land has almost reached its limit, and we must therefore rely on new increases in productivity, on enhancing the value of agricultural labour and on solidarity as part and parcel of those innovative weapons for resolving the new dilemma of the twenty-first century.

Lastly, no previous shortage has had a greater effect on the feeding of human beings. The shortage of foodstuffs and its significance for animal feed will also have an undeniable impact, not yet clearly determined, on the production of animal protein for human consumption.

It is only natural that the food shortage and crisis should affect first and foremost the least developed peoples, who are also being punished by a world energy crisis arising from an increase in demand for and speculation in oil, among other reasons.

The energy crisis is having a twofold impact on the food crisis. On the one hand, the increase in the cost of transportation has an impact on the cost of food. On the other hand, the production of biofuels affects the prices of foodstuffs. That has been confirmed by a study of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, issued only five days ago. The study also asserts that support policies for biofuel production are expensive, have little impact on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and contribute little to the energy security of the producing countries.

These are particularly dire times. The magnitude and nature of the present and future crises alert us to the fact that there will be no easy or swift solutions. Sacrifice, the need for reflection and study, and new displays of solidarity must guide the international community and the Organization in their endeavours to safeguard the well-being of future generations.

Thus, Costa Rica thanks the Secretary-General for his efforts in establishing and guiding the High-

Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis, as well as the international organizations, agencies and funds that extended their assistance to developing the comprehensive framework for action. Both the actions aimed at responding to immediate needs and those geared to promoting recovery in the long term point in the right direction.

However, Costa Rica wishes to call for the fulfilment of the United Nations targets for development assistance. Last year saw the third consecutive reduction in development assistance funds, and only four member countries of the Development Assistance Committee exceeded 0.7 per cent of their gross national income. Some major donors are still well below 0.2 per cent.

While Costa Rica backs the measures that have been proposed, as well as those that may be adopted within intergovernmental negotiations, we caution that, in addition to those, the world must move towards new goals of fairness and solidarity. That is the only way that we shall overcome today's crises and threats in the medium and long term.

Mr. Hermida Castillo (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, we would like to congratulate President Kerim for having convened this special meeting on the food and energy crisis. We express our support for the Secretary-General in determining the causes of and proposed solutions to the crisis.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements made by the representatives of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and of Honduras on behalf of the Central American Integration System.

My statement will be limited to recalling a few of the main points which should be taken into account when we attempt to formulate and apply strategies to resolve the crisis that brings us together today.

As was wisely mentioned in the document that the Secretary-General transmitted a few days ago and which we are analysing in a detailed way today, the food crisis is the culmination of a structural crisis of an economic model that was thrust upon the world. This crisis could be discerned from the beginning of the millennium, and a few world leaders warned of the consequences of the production of biofuels in this way and with these ends in mind.

If this comprehensive framework for action aimed to reduce the existing gaps between humanitarian assistance and development assistance, we have to work on the basis that this humanitarian assistance would be more a responsibility that should be assumed by those who have imposed the economic model that is now falling apart and which, even so, imposes conditions on humanitarian assistance.

We take note of the establishment of a framework of standards for biofuel production as well as promoting research on the impact of biofuels on food security. Nonetheless, the reality is that due to a countless number of conflicting interests, these negotiations could take a great deal of time which we do not have the luxury to afford.

On the basis of this reality, the most important thing is to stress that there is nothing as inhuman as planting food to fuel machines rather than human beings, since we have 950 million people in the world who lack food. As a result, the latter must be the starting point of any decision, bearing in mind that it would be impossible to talk about development and attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) if there is no human capital to achieve those things.

Furthermore, taking up the idea of the structural causes of the crisis, solutions must also be structural in nature, because otherwise we would fall into a vicious circle and in time other crises would emerge.

In this respect, the comprehensive framework document proposes the reduction or elimination of trade distortions, including restrictions and farm subsidies in developed countries. Nicaragua reasserts that we must eliminate those factors, since if we do not, we would be triggering that vicious circle, which the free market fuels. That is especially true if we want to implement as a strategy the strengthening of existing programmes to promote the agricultural sector instead of establishing new programmes, thus making it crucial to change strategies and policies that have proved to be inefficient.

It would be impossible not to consider the possibility that if we do not mobilize the political will to resolve the issues that I have mentioned, it would be difficult to find the will to tackle one of the greatest challenges to mankind, namely climate change and its devastating effects.

With respect to the energy crisis, we stress that the first measure must be to change the wasteful consumption patterns of industrialized countries.

In response to the needs of Latin American and Caribbean countries, a union emerged based on the solidarity of peoples. This is reflected in PetroCaribe and the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), which was established thanks to the generosity of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and which allows access to oil at preferential prices and under preferential conditions.

When the price of a barrel of oil crossed the $100 mark, the payment of 50 per cent of the bill in 90 days was reduced to 40 per cent. Indeed, when the price of a barrel went beyond $150, President Hugo Chávez expressed the consent of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to reduce to 30 per cent the payment for this same 90-day timeline; the rest was financed over 25 years with an extremely low 1-per-cent year-over-year rate of interest.

This is truly an expression of solidarity, and it is a mechanism of real and effective integration of political, social and economic cooperation based on complementarity, respect for sovereignty and the self-determination of peoples. These are the bases for a fair market in which 18 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have agreed to participate.

The depth of this crisis forces us to acknowledge that the consumerist lifestyle can no longer be sustained and that, instead of thinking about how to produce more food and fuel for this consumerist system, we have to think about how to begin to save, conserve and sustainably produce these resources. We must generate these profound changes in socio-economic policies. But we also have to apply these changes in each of our activities, including the most basic ones, which means that not all changes are technological, but rather, and above all, are changes in awareness.

Mr. Alahraf (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to extend my thanks to the President for organizing this meeting. We hope that it will contribute to efforts to deal with the global food and energy crisis. I would like to express my delegation's support for the statements made by the representative of Ethiopia on behalf of the Group of African States and by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

There is no doubt that the General Assembly's consideration of this issue provides us with the opportunity to hear the different positions and views on how to deal with the global food crisis. I would like to thank the Secretary-General for transmitting the comprehensive framework for action, which proposes a number of actions to deal with the challenges posed by the global food crisis. We believe that this document provides us with an opportunity to discuss and interact, bridging the gaps in our points of view and reaching a common understanding on the starting point for identifying sustainable long-term solutions for this crisis.

We believe, in this context, that sustainable development is the comprehensive framework for dealing with the situation and implementing appropriate solutions. It has become clear that many developing countries, particularly the poorest among them, are facing an acute food crisis that could threaten their political and socio-economic stability. Despite the fact that providing emergency food aid is a rapid and positive response that can help ease the crisis, a radical solution requires an understanding of the erroneous international policies of the past two decades. Such policies failed to focus sufficiently on threats to food security such as the increase in population, the impact of climate change and the decrease in agricultural production. There is evidence that capital flows have distorted markets in basic foodstuffs, thereby worsening the situation.

Making the situation still worse, emergency international aid to the agricultural sector has declined in recent years, from $8 billion to $3.4 billion. The rise in energy costs does not seem to be one of the principal reasons for the rise in food prices; while one must recognize that the increased transport and shipment costs are one of the causes, these are not a direct cause of the crisis.

We should concentrate on seeking means to deal with the crisis in an objective manner. In this context, we agree that investment in agriculture is a key tool for combating poverty and hunger and ensuring sustainable development. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Trade Organization and the international financial institutions therefore have the responsibility to encourage such investment on the country and regional levels especially in developing countries.

Rich countries are also called upon to give up their policies of protecting their agricultural products and to allow fair competition, which opens the doors

for developing countries to increase their agricultural production and obtain modern agricultural technology and better means of increasing the quantity and quality of their agricultural output.

It is paradoxical that a world which in 2006 spent more than $1.2 trillion on weapons currently faces a food crisis. Only $30 billion to $40 billion per year is needed to guarantee increased agricultural production, to provide food for those who find difficulty in securing their livelihood and to protect future generations from hunger and poverty.

It has become clear that the international community needs to adopt and implement strategic policies based on dialogue, taking our common interests into account. We emphasize the importance of coordinating and uniting national, regional and international efforts to guarantee increases in food production. We must eliminate the obstacles to that, by providing financing, building national capacities, and facilitating access to technology and other things needed for production.

Libya is among the food-importing countries. In order to ease the food crisis, we have reduced or eliminated fees and tariffs on food imports and, at the national level, we are carrying out a project to grow wheat on 100,000 hectares of irrigated land, showing the importance of regional complementarity as a major factor in increasing the quality and quantity of production. With a number of African countries, Libya is making joint investments to increase agricultural production and encourage private investment in this sector.

Finally, I would like to emphasize the efforts undertaken by the High-Level Task Force established by the Secretary-General to establish a framework to deal with this crisis. We hope that the international community will address this crisis in good conscience and without political considerations. We should realize that any increase in the number of the hungry and in their suffering could trigger an economic and social crisis affecting the security and stability of many of our communities and peoples.

Mr. Maksimychev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): First and foremost, I would like to thank the President for his initiative to convene this debate.

It is tragic that in the twenty-first century, notwithstanding the unprecedented development of productive capacity, the growth in labour productivity and public wealth and the flourishing of science and technology the likes of which we have never seen before, the United Nations is compelled to address the problem of the world food crisis and the threat of hunger. The sharp increase in food prices threatens to become a grave crisis.

The history of food prices is a further demonstration of how responsibly one must approach economic decisions and how meticulously one must calculate their consequences, including social ones. There are various views on the reasons for what is happening. It is all too easy to explain the crisis away by blaming the growth in consumption in major developing countries, especially those with large populations. But those countries can mostly feed themselves, so they are not the main causes; other factors are in play here. We feel that an extremely adverse role was played by the abrupt shift, one that was subsidized to boot, to the production of biofuel from food crops. There has been a substantial distortion in the world agricultural market as a result of export subsidies by developed countries. As a result, agriculture is stagnating in many developing countries. The rush to enrich and support domestic farmers has entailed the ruin of others. Pragmatism does not allow any country to spurn protective measures, and the price rises were predictable.

We feel that the international community's response to the global food crisis must proceed on two tracks: a humanitarian one, providing the necessary assistance for the countries and regions most severely afflicted by the crisis; and a long-term one, eradicating the reasons for the crisis and creating conditions for sustainable food security worldwide.

Existing technologies allow us to provide full food supplies to twice as many people as live on our planet today. We need to take decisions that will make it possible to tap these opportunities in the interests of all people. We also need a precisely calibrated approach to the development of genetically modified products, which would resolve a number of food issues, but on which humankind has not yet found common ground.

The only way out of the crisis is through harmonious, national and international action by all countries in the form of a wide-ranging global partnership on agriculture and food, with the

coordinating role taken by the United Nations. An important step in that direction was the Rome Conference on Food Security and the declaration adopted there.

The Russian response to the food crisis will be a maximum stepping up of food output, including of grains, and the development of agricultural infrastructure. Russia used to be one of the world's largest grain suppliers and intends to regain that position. Of course, we have an interest in participating in international cooperative efforts as well, including scientific research, economic analysis and training.

We support the drive for an early conclusion to the negotiations on agricultural trade. The time is clearly now for closer attention to be paid to a holistic discussion of future international agricultural policy. In our view, the appropriate venue for this is the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). This would bolster its central role and effectiveness. Obviously, this year and next, we will have to vigorously tackle issues related to stabilizing food markets and will need to study a number of interesting ideas proposed by our partners, including at the Rome Conference, in June.

As the Assembly well knows, President Medvedev of Russia, at the Group of Eight (G8) Summit held in July in Toyako, proposed a number of ideas, including the convening of a meeting of G8 agriculture ministers in conjunction with an invitation to major food producer and exporter countries and key international organizations.

A further Russian initiative is the world grain summit planned for 2009 in Moscow: a wide-ranging, high-level ministerial forum with the participation of representatives of major grain-producing Powers, international organizations, major associations, grain-producing companies and traders. Its aim would be to discuss possible measures to stabilize grain market prices, increase production, create reserves, including virtual reserves and ensure the necessary investments in infrastructure and reductions in speculative manipulation.

As regards the energy crisis, the reasons for the surges of instability and frenetic demand we are witnessing on oil markets are also very diverse. However, unlike agriculture, a major role is played by political instability in the Middle East region. Speculation is also a strong factor.

We feel that the response to the energy crisis must be formulated on the basis of the principles of global energy security adopted at the G8 Summit in Saint Petersburg in 2006. Their leitmotif is the shared responsibility of producers and consumers of energy resources, the responsibility of transit countries and the establishment of relations of true partnership among all players on the energy market. In this regard, much seems to have been done, but the real market situation shows that efforts must be continued. We are talking here about establishing a favourable investment regime, a transparent system for market access and the use of the full range of renewable energy sources, not just biofuels.

How the energy market position develops will ultimately determine the solution to a number of complex food and climate change problems. Russia's policy is fully consistent with our international obligations. We are stepping up opportunities for the transport of energy resources. We have decided to liberalize the gas market and to reduce the tax burden on the oil sector. We are concluding large-scale reforms in the electrical power sector. Decisions have been taken on a set of measures to enhance energy efficiency.

Those steps will not only bolster the Russian fuel and energy sectors, but will also make a telling contribution to stabilizing global energy markets. We are on the threshold of booming nuclear power, with countries being pushed towards it also by the surge in oil prices. We are wholly in favour of nuclear power as the only alternative source able to occupy a key place in the energy balance in the near future.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Syrian Arab Republic aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. I should like to extend my thanks to the President of the General Assembly for holding this meeting on the global food and energy crises.

Previous speakers have underscored the seriousness of the food and energy crisis that threatens the daily livelihood of millions of people in the world. This could threaten the stability and security of the many countries that are disproportionately affected by the crisis. Given the surge in food and energy prices, the crisis should be taken seriously due to its great

impact on the economic development of many developing countries.

In that context, my delegation notes that the surge in energy prices is compounded by the environment of tension and instability that results from the foreign policies of some major Powers on the international scene, in particular in the Middle East. There is also the speculation in oil products and commodities that we are witnessing on the international money markets in developed countries.

The rise in food prices and the food crisis in general have a number of causes. One is the decline in international investment in the agricultural production and research sectors and the increased demand resulting from the rising world population and enhanced purchasing power in certain countries. Another factor is increased investment in alternatives to fossil fuels, resulting in the production of biofuels from crops usually grown for human consumption. Yet another is the speculation of food prices in the international money and commodity markets, particularly in developed countries.

In the environmental sphere, we note the great frequency of climatic disasters that cause a reduction in agricultural production; these include drought, desertification, frost, rising temperatures and declining water resources. Such environmental factors result basically from increased rates of pollution and from the failure of some countries to respect their obligations under the Kyoto Agreement and other international agreements and conventions on the protection of the environment. Most countries in the Arab region, particularly Syria, suffer as a result of those environmental factors.

My country believes that any international strategy to bring about food security must take into account all of those factors and deal with the root causes of the crisis, in a context that leads to promoting the three pillars for sustainable development — the economic, the social and the environmental. Above all, that strategy should be founded on genuine political will, particularly by the developed countries.

Over the past three decades, my country, Syria, has achieved self-sufficiency and food security through the special priority the Government has given to the agricultural sector, which now constitutes a significant part of Syria's gross domestic product.

The ongoing Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan since 1967 has deprived my country of its more fertile and productive agricultural lands, and we have lost a large opportunity for agricultural labour. The Israeli occupation authorities have exposed our occupied territory to serious environmental danger, with the burial of toxic waste in the occupied Syrian Golan. That is a very serious matter, to which we have repeatedly drawn the attention of the international community in more than one forum. We have called upon it to pressure Israel to stop such activities and remove toxic nuclear waste from our occupied territory.

Our capitals have not been given the opportunity to study and consider the comprehensive framework for action prepared by the High-Level Task Force set up by the Secretary-General: the framework was made available only one day prior to this meeting. In general, we could say that there needs to be more detail concerning the implementation of the framework, which includes financing. If we wish to secure the resources necessary for the implementation of the framework, we must ensure that these are not provided at the expense of official development assistance, which has decreased over the past two years, or at the expense of achieving the Millennium Development Goals. We should ensure that the comprehensive framework for action is accepted by the Member States and, to achieve that and to ensure its relevance, it must be implemented and developed in keeping with the developments in the crisis and with the specific circumstances of the developing countries.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to emphasize the importance of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council in formulating an international strategy to achieve food security. That requires greater interaction between the Assembly and the Economic and Social Council and the High-Level Task Force set up for that purpose.

Ms. Aitimova (Kazakhstan): At the outset, I would like to thank you for the initiative in organizing this meeting and for inviting the Secretary-General to brief the General Assembly on the revised version of the comprehensive framework for action developed by the High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis.

It is true, as the comprehensive framework for action concludes, that the global food crisis poses

existing and potential dangers to households, Governments and the international system in terms of food and nutrition insecurity. Before the rapid rise in food prices, some 854 million people worldwide were already estimated to be undernourished. The crisis may drive another 100 million more people into poverty and hunger.

Kazakhstan shares the view that the current food crisis has been brought about by a number of closely interrelated factors such as food prices, vigorous population growth, biofuel production and climate change. As the causes of the crisis are numerous and intertwined, dealing with them requires a holistic and coherent approach. The international community should act in unison and consistently, and Governments, the United Nations system, development banks, non-governmental organizations, the scientific community and the private sector also have an important role to play in that common endeavour.

We believe that, first of all, it is important to ensure the expeditious disbursement of all pledged contributions to finance emergency food aid. All Member States should demonstrate the necessary political will and flexibility to bring about a new trade regime, one that would strengthen food security by promoting food production and investment in the agricultural sector of developing economies. In that regard, we underscore the necessity of intensifying efforts to complete the Doha Round of trade talks.

It is also important to ensure effective work by the international financial institutions and to review carefully programmes promoting biofuel use in order to prevent those programmes from undermining food security.

We strongly believe that there is an urgent need to develop closer regional cooperation that would promote partnerships at the macro and micro levels to mitigate the negative impact of the crisis and to strengthen food security.

At the international level, strengthened partnerships and increased actions by all stakeholders in a comprehensive, coordinated and coherent manner are critical, as many factors underlying the food crisis are global in nature and require actions across country and regional borders.

A clear mention should have been made in the comprehensive framework for action of subsidies and trade-distorting practices in the developed world as a major deterrent to agricultural development in the developing world. Kazakhstan would also like to stress that the issue of access to technology in order to increase agricultural food production and productivity in developing countries should be mentioned in the comprehensive framework for action.

The problems of food security and sustainable development have been addressed in various forums, including the high-level conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in Rome. We think that the main factor in achieving the goals that we set in order to find a way out of the prevailing situation is the political will of the leaders of all States to implement recommendations adopted in various forums in the past and the active support of international and regional organizations, including the United Nations.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his leadership in developing concrete responses to the food crises, and I assure the Assembly that Kazakhstan will continue its efforts to resolve this urgent and complex issue.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 35/2 of 13 October 1980, I now call upon the Observer for the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization.

Ms. Contreras (Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization): The problem of inadequate food supply is not a new one for developing countries. Millions of people have suffered for decades from famine, and agricultural economies have always been subject to such natural disasters as droughts and floods. However, for a variety of reasons, the widespread and acute shortages of food that now confront us have provoked us to take determined and concerted action.

Globalization and interdependence mean that all countries, not just developing ones, will feel the effects of a diminishing food supply. At the same time, we have the knowledge and resources to attack this problem, and it is political will, more than a lack of resources, that prevents us from taking the necessary steps.

The Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization welcomes the comprehensive framework for action and considers securing the human right to adequate nutrition to be fundamental. We believe that

action to combat hunger should be carried out in accordance with the right of everyone to be free from hunger. We believe that the responsibility of ensuring that right lies with each country. Each State has a fundamental obligation to develop policies and strategies to eliminate hunger, relying on the principle of sustainability.

The impacts of the incorrect distribution and production of food that lead to hunger are felt from local to international levels, creating social, humanitarian, political and environmental problems and thus becoming a continuing global challenge. In that respect, each country and the international community should focus on building capacity to implement the legal framework for sustainable development across all sectors, as countries cannot deal with food security in isolation.

Furthermore, at the juncture between the issues of food security and energy is the issue of biofuels. Scientists now have determined that biofuels can be made from waste wood materials, cellulose and other non-food fibres. Devoting corn or other food resources and the croplands on which they are grown to the production of biofuels jeopardizes the food supply that comes from those commodities. Some Governments and United Nations bodies have been advocating the concept of food for fuel. That recommendation should be seriously reviewed. Therefore, the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization believes that it is important for States to consult together and develop an international consensus on the use and promotion of biofuels, and the use of techniques such as environmental impact assessments should contribute to that consensus.

While the importance of agriculture and grain to the world food supply should not be understated, we would like to have seen the comprehensive framework for action address the critical role of oceans in the world food supply, including fish stocks and the very real and severe threat of their depletion. Today, the United Nations Environment Programme estimates that 75 per cent of the world's fish stocks are exploited or over-exploited. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment echoes the same warning: the world's capture fisheries are operating beyond sustainable demands.

Just last month, the ninth meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea convened to discuss the topic of maritime safety and security. An emerging issue of vital importance to maritime security highlighted by the Consultative Process is the link between security issues, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and overfishing. In the context of food security, overfishing and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing cannot be overlooked. Critical to this is the development of comprehensive integrated coastal zone management systems.

The work of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Food Programme have been focused on meeting famine relief objectives and other urgent needs for supplying food. What is needed is a more sustained and systematic building of capacity for producing and supplying food, from the scientific, socio-economic and legal perspectives. The Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization urges that those points of view be given greater emphasis.

Mr. Al-Ansari (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Permit me at the outset to thank the President of the General Assembly for having taken the initiative to convene this important meeting to shed light on the critical situation facing the world's poor, who are suffering as a result of the global food crisis, with soaring food prices that are too high for them to afford. In particular, we thank him for having placed this item on the Organization's agenda, for engaging the international community in this review during a high-level debate of the General Assembly and for inviting the heads of State or Government who will participate in the Assembly at its forthcoming session to become involved in the discussion.

I also wish to thank the Secretary-General for his valuable statement, in which he examined the problem in all its aspects, discussed its imminent dangers and explained the measures required to address it. I take this opportunity to congratulate him on the initiative to establish the High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis, which has been mandated to promote a unified response to the global food crisis and to develop a framework for action and coordinate its implementation among the entities of the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made at the 112th plenary meeting by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda, which currently holds the chairmanship of the Group of 77 and China.

The food crisis is a reality that is negatively affecting the poor in urban and rural areas in the world's developing countries. The past three years have witnessed an astronomical rise in the prices of food commodities. During the first quarter of 2008, the price of wheat increased 130 per cent and the price of maize 30 per cent over 2007 levels. While the price of rice saw moderate increases in 2006 and 2007, it rose by 10 per cent in February 2008 and by a further 10 per cent in March.

Food commodity prices continue to skyrocket in developing countries. That situation requires coordinated action by the international community, in particular the United Nations. It has prompted the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, to warn that "The rapidly escalating crisis of food availability around the world has reached emergency proportions". And, as Lennart Bage, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), recently stated:

> "Responding effectively to the impact of higher food prices must be a top priority for the global community, particularly when the impact is combined with the projected effects of climate change".

The time when there was easy access to food is long past. Today, the world is witnessing unprecedented price increases on the global food and grain markets. Current market analyses indicate that that trend will continue for the foreseeable future. Undoubtedly, this rise in food commodity prices will have detrimental effects on those living in dire poverty throughout the world. Food accounts for an average of 60 to 80 per cent of the daily expenditures of the poor. The situation grows even worse when one considers that there are more than 850 million poor people throughout the world. Soaring global food prices threaten to undermine the efforts being made to reduce poverty and could delay for many years the achievement of the related Millennium Development Goal in poor countries.

The staggering increase in food commodity prices is also expected to broaden the incidence of abject poverty by adding another 100 million people — including 39 million Africans — to the ranks of the extremely poor. It is a tragedy that the majority of the more than 2 billion people who live and work on smallholder farms are impoverished, struggling to live on less than $2 a day. Many of them are unable to benefit from the soaring prices of food commodities owing to their inability to obtain the fertilizers and seeds needed to boost their crop yields. Moreover, they are unable to gain access to markets because of poor road conditions and high transportation costs. Yet, despite the dizzying rise in food commodity prices, smallholder farmers have not reaped any of its benefits, as they are compelled to sell their crops at low prices in order to meet their needs, while still having to pay exorbitant prices to obtain food for themselves.

In our view, the crisis has multiple causes, including a shortage of agricultural commodities on world markets, adverse weather patterns, rising fuel prices, a considerable expansion in the production of biofuels and new restrictions imposed in many areas of international trade.

During the meeting of the Chief Executives Board held in Bern, Switzerland, on 28 and 29 April 2008, the heads of United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes and of the Bretton Woods institutions called for swift action to provide farmers in developing countries with the support necessary to see them through the next crop cycle. Therefore, we commend the IFAD initiative launched on 25 April 2008 to provide $200 million to increase agricultural production in developing countries in order to curb the rise in food prices and increase stocks of food commodities in global markets. We also appreciate the close cooperation and support provided by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Food Programme and IFAD to the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme and the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

The State of Qatar, which has continued to contribute effectively to global development efforts, will do its utmost to remain an effective actor in the global partnerships searching for radical solutions to the global food crisis.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item. The General Assembly has concluded its plenary meeting on the global food and energy crisis. The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 48.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.